

7-1-2011

Book Review: Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building Bridges Instead of Barriers by Edward H. Hammett

Lloyd W. Rodgers

International Mission Board

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalarchives.apu.edu/gcrj>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rodgers, L. W. (2011). Book Review: Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building Bridges Instead of Barriers by Edward H. Hammett. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 3(1), 141-144. Retrieved from <https://digitalarchives.apu.edu/gcrj/vol3/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by APU Digital Archives. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Commission Research Journal by an authorized editor of APU Digital Archives. For more information, please contact mpacino@apu.edu.

Rodgers: Book Review: *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building Bridges* require thorough treatment if the beginning student is to understand and effectively engage the world's cultures; worldview identification and understanding, critical contextualization, and animism and pervasive syncretism are a few of these.

Introducing Cultural Anthropology does in fact introduce the discipline of cultural anthropology to the reader. Those who study this text will certainly have a basic knowledge of cultural anthropology and the introductory theories, fields, and concepts most central to its study. However, they will not have an understanding of how to rightly apply the Word of God within various cultural constructs, understanding and discerning the instances in which biblical absolutes supersede cultural norms. It is this task of critical contextualization that most requires an understanding of cultural anthropology. *Introducing Cultural Anthropology* is a well-written and helpful new tool for introducing the discipline of cultural anthropology in a Christian classroom but will need to be supplemented by other works, teaching, and guidance to find practical application in missions contexts.

141

Edward H. Hammett, *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building Bridges Instead of Barriers*. Chalice, 2005, xv + 188 pp., \$19.99.

Reviewed by Lloyd W. Rodgers, Ph.D., Director, International Centre for Excellence in Leadership, International Mission Board

Helping local church leadership discover God's agenda as they seek practical ways to engage a secular, postmodern culture is the ministry calling of Edward Hammett. He is a certified Christian coach (PCC), consultant, and author of numerous books and articles on spiritual formation, outreach, and Christian leadership. As part of the Columbia Partnership Leadership Series, *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age* came out of a conversation between the author and an unchurched friend who asked him honestly why churches "work so hard building barriers to keep me out rather than bridges to let me in" (80). Describing those bridges—and naming the barriers—is the purpose of this book.

Although the book is divided into four sections, the first three contain the primary themes. In the first section, "Spiritual Leadership *in* the Church" (emphasis in original), Hammett asks a pivotal question of church leaders: Does your church exist solely to serve its gathered membership, or does it have a vision for building bridges to engage those who live outside the church culture? Faced with the reality of a rapidly evolving U.S. cultural landscape, as the gap between

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 [2021], Art. 12
church culture and secular culture continues to widen, many churches have responded by retreating into a maintenance mentality. Instead of a Great Commission-grounded, outward focus, the primary mission becomes safeguarding traditional church structures. Unless priorities change, the church will be an increasingly irrelevant part of the cultural landscape to secular people.

A different kind of church leadership is needed to move a congregation from maintenance to mission—one that is willing to unlearn some aspects of church culture, bring congregational self-perceptions to light, engage in collaboration with members passionate about going into the world, and respond to cultural challenges with the same “sense of fluidity” that Jesus modeled (31). Hammett writes, “To move away from a mission of maintenance, spiritual leadership must shift from *in* the church to *through* the church” (emphasis in original, 40).

142 This mission aspect of spiritual leadership is the theme of the second section, reaching out to secular culture through the local church. Leaders model a solution to finding God by living a life of spiritual leadership that those outside the church can recognize and trust. These “broken people” need a place of safety, where relationships are built first within the context of their own culture and worldview. Discipleship is a whole-person process of coming to faith in Christ that begins even before conversion. We are called to connect to people outside traditional church settings, listening and asking the right questions at the right time. This requires what Hammett terms “performing exegesis” on the unchurched culture. We must pay attention to what is important to them as a meaningful experience and in so doing have the privilege of discerning those authentic movements toward God.

For this kind of spiritual leadership to become a reality, however, it must be intentional, working to mobilize members for mission. According to Hammett, “Spiritual leadership *as* the church dissolves the distinctions between clergy and laity and creates a mission-minded, culture-penetrating partnership for the cause of Christ” (emphasis in original, 67). The church must determine the form and functions of church leadership roles according to biblical models, not local church traditions.

Hammett notes that the local church establishes trust by offering unconditional love to spiritual travelers outside the church. We include them before they become followers of Christ, earning the right to be heard and establishing friendships through trusted relationships. The result will be “creating thirst in a postmodern world” (88), which is not easy in a society where discretionary time is hard to find. The key is decentralizing discipleship efforts.

In the third section of his book, Hammett describes the process and privilege of growing spiritual leaders *as* the church, a vision of believers not just as the

Rodgers: Book Review: *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building Bridges* gathered, institutional body of Christ but also as the scattered, out-in-the-world church. He makes a strong case for the use of Christian coaching as a way to reframe leadership training and growing faithful disciples engaged as spiritual salt and light in the world. This will only happen, though, as God's people move from a position of entitlement (believing you deserve something simply because of who you are) to an intentional seeking of empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Hammett concludes by reminding the reader that our engagement of the unchurched is about a spiritual journey of action and forward movement, leading from the heart. Building bridges with the postmodern culture toward conversion and the process of life transformation, we learn to mark the significant events in their life as landmarks they can experience, touch, feel, and return to. These remind them—and remind us—of encounters with God. At the same time, new believers need help acknowledging “landmines,” those events that can damage our relationship with God. If we are too focused on traditions inside the institutional church, we will miss the need to create traditions for outside the church.

143

The major strength of *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age* is the way in which Hammett weaves into his book open-ended, dialogue-learning questions to help the reader process insights and apply them to his or her own ministry situation. The author presents many options under each topic heading and encourages the church leadership practitioner to reflect on the practice of engaging the unchurched by understanding the perspective of a secular worldview.

The insight that Christian discipleship is a process that begins with establishing trust-filled relationships with the unchurched is a biblical one that recognizes the importance of dealing with worldview issues. Hammett is correct to point out that Paul's own ministry demonstrates the leadership shifts necessary to discern God's movement and follow Him into the world. On pages 94–96, Hammett describes the “Four Disciple-making Phases in the Life of Jesus:” Come See, Follow Me, Be with Me, and Abide in Me. As a framework for the process of discipleship and spiritual leadership development, Hammett admits that there are many different ways to apply these phases. The implication remains that Jesus models a sequential process. We see evidence of the four phases in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4, as trust is established, learning takes place, her life is changed, and she leads others to encounter Christ for themselves. It would have been helpful for this reviewer to see an example from Hammett's own experience of this entire discipleship process worked out in the life of an individual who began their journey of faith and trust outside the church.

One of the most challenging tasks for the local church leader who seeks to respond to God's call to reach the unchurched is resisting the temptation to define

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 [2021], Art. 12
the task in terms of programmed steps instead of where it belongs, as a part of spiritual leadership. As Hammett emphasizes, Christians earn the right to talk about their own spiritual journey by establishing trusted relationships with those outside the church. At the same time, a sense of urgency leads us to be intentional about sharing our story and the biblical call to follow Christ. This happens in many ways, often numerous times within the same relationship. There is a difference between judging which causes a relationship barrier and demonstrating clearly that a personal relationship with Him, through Christ, is the desire of God's heart.

Several editorial weaknesses plague this book, not the least of which is the lack of a cohesive structure; Hammett simply tries to put too many varied topics, assessments, and resources into one package. The result is not enough space for in-depth case studies to help illustrate the principle themes. It is helpful when reading this book to remember that it was published in 2005. Some of the important websites Hammett recommends no longer exist or have changed addresses.

In conclusion, Hammett is one of those people who understands clearly the challenges faced by North American churches in the face of shifting cultural landscapes. Christian spiritual leadership is effective to the extent it connects to those outside the church, while maintaining the integrity of faith. The congregation must decide: Is our church for us or is it for them?

Tom Steffen, *The Facilitator Era: Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011, 399 pp., \$46.00.

Reviewed by Matthew L. Pierce, former missionary to Thailand, student, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Tom Steffen served with New Tribes Mission for twenty years and is Professor of Intercultural Studies in the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University in La Mirada, California. Steffen's aim in this current work is to address what he has noticed to be a growing trend: many missionaries are moving away from the role as pioneer church planter into the role of facilitator. Facilitators work with existing national church-planting movements in training, Bible translation, and even selecting national church planters. Their roles are varied, and they are usually more holistic than previous generations of church planters.

Ralph Winter identified three eras of modern missions: Era 1, William Carey focused on the coastlands; Era 2, Hudson Taylor went inland; Era 3, Donald